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## Haiti

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

### **International Religious Freedom Report 2010**

**November 17, 2010**

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country, which shares the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, has an area of 10,714 square miles and a population of 9.9 million.

A UN Population Fund census released in 2006 (based on 2003 data) lists the following religious demographics: 54.7 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 15.4 percent Baptist, 7.9 percent Pentecostal, and 3 percent Seventh-day Adventist. There are Episcopalians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Muslims, Scientologists, and practitioners of Vodou (voodoo). Recent estimates indicated that half of the population practiced Vodou, most of them along with other religious practices.

#### Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The constitution provides for the establishment of laws to regulate the recognition and operation of religious groups. The administration and monitoring of religious affairs falls under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship. The Bureau of Religious Affairs within the ministry is responsible for registering churches, clergy, and missionaries.

Historically, Roman Catholicism was the official religion. While this official status ended with the enactment of the 1987 constitution, neither the government nor the Holy See renounced the 1860 concordat, which serves as the basis for relations between the Catholic Church (and its religious orders) and the state. In many respects Catholicism retains its traditional primacy among the country's religious groups. As part of the concordat, the government provided a monthly stipend to Catholic priests. However, the government recognized the increasing role of Protestant churches. During the reporting period, the Provisional Electoral Council included Catholic, Protestant, and Vodou representatives.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Good Friday, Corpus Christi, the Feast of the Assumption, All Saints' Day, All Souls' Day, and Christmas.

Recognition by the Bureau of Religious Affairs afforded religious groups standing in legal disputes, protected their tax-exempt status, and extended civil recognition to documents such as marriage and baptismal certificates. Goods imported for use by registered religious groups and missionaries were exempt from customs duties, and the government does not tax registered churches. Requirements for registration with the bureau included information on qualifications of the group's leader, a membership list, and a list of the group's social projects. Registered religious groups must submit an annual report of their activities to the bureau. Most Catholic and Protestant organizations were registered. Although legally permitted to register, many nondenominational Christian groups and Vodou practitioners operated informally and did not seek official recognition. There were no reports of this requirement restricting the operation of a religious group. The National Council of Muslims in Haiti applied for legal recognition and was awaiting approval at the end of the reporting period.

Organized missionary groups and missionaries affiliated with independent churches operated hospitals, orphanages, schools, and clinics. Foreign missionaries entered as regular tourists and submitted paperwork similar to that submitted by domestic religious groups to the Bureau of Religious Affairs. Although there were delays in the issuing of residence permits, bureaucratic problems were regarded as the cause.

The constitution provides for freedom of conscience and association, and stipulates that persons cannot be obliged to join an organization or receive religious instruction contrary to their convictions.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion.

#### Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Religion plays a prominent role in society, and citizens freely expressed their religious beliefs. Some religious groups were politically active. Interfaith cooperation was perhaps most effective in the National Federation of Private Schools. While society generally was tolerant of the variety of religious practices, Christian attitudes toward Vodou ranged from acceptance as part of the culture to rejection as incompatible with Christianity. These differing perspectives led to isolated instances of conflict.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. embassy representatives routinely met with religious and civil society leaders to seek their views, including on religious freedom.

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